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On the Common Christian Responsibility Toward Areas of Rapid Social Change

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INDIA'S QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY

by

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(The Committee for Literature on Social Concerns in India has published a booklet on India's Quest for Democracy, (1955) and this article is a reprint of chapters 4 and 6. Dr. Devanandan is the chairman of the Committee for Literature on Social Concerns and M.M. Thomas is editorial secretary of the Committee and also staff consultant in Asia for the World Council's study on rapid social change.)

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P.D. Devanandan and M.M. Thomas

The State and Society

Undoubtedly the most fruitful development in India during the British connection, has been the recognition that it is the role of the state to preserve freedom and order. This conception of political organisation has now given place to a more dynamic view which makes the state responsible also for guiding social and economic life. State action is all the more necessary to transform the backward economy of India as speedily as possible. This responsibility of the state for satisfying the primary needs of the people such as economic security, education and other forms of social welfare, is clearly acknowledged in the Directive Principles of State Policy in our Constitution. The Welfare State and a socialistic pattern of society have become the goals of the Indian Government. Therefore national planning of economic and social development are accepted as national policies; laws have been passed aiming at reforming the family, raising the status of women, and improving the conditions of the backward sections of the people.

This tremendous extension of the scope and activities of the state in India has raised the whole discussion of democracy versus totalitarianism to a new plane. There is no going back on the idea of planning in India, as elsewhere, and opposition to it in terms of the old laissez faire concept of the state has no longer any substance. The issue now is not between planning and freedom but between totalitarian and democratic planning. Can we plan effectively for social and economic welfare and achieve the objectives without sacrificing freedom of thought, expression and association? Can a better society be achieved without destroying the right of opposition, the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of the press, and the liberty of the private life of the individual and the family? Can changes be made in the educational pattern without interfering with the freedom of institutions like our universities to regulate their own life? In other words, can all these needed changes be accomplished without too great a centralisation of political and economic power which may lead to the destruction of freedom and democratic institutions?

While these are some of the problems of planning in India, many possible dangers have to be faced courageously because of the urgent need for a social and economic revolution which will make democracy acceptable to the people. Therefore, not a static but a dynamic conception of democracy is needed. For instance, Chester Bowles has pointed out that the inadequacy of land reform in India is due to the fact that Pandit Nehru's "very dedication to the legal and constitutional principles of the West" has prevented him from "acting decisively to strengthen democracy at its roots". Curiously enough, Pandit Nehru has also been criticised as anti-democratic for bringing in an amendment to Article 31 of the Constitution which does not tally with the "legal and constitutional principles of the West". It illustrates the need to reformulate democratic methods to suit a situation like ours.

There are three tests by which the success of democratic planning can be gauged. They can be used as a kind of yardstick to judge whether the methods employed are democratic or not.

Firstly, the effect of every type of legislation and governmental action sponsored by the centre, the provinces and the local bodies upon the nature and function of the state must be carefully analysed. This is not an abstract and theoretical problem. The state's attempt to grapple with many practical difficulties by legislative, executive and judicial enactments, may result in an unconscious miscarriage of its democratic purpose and intentions. The state may also adhere to theories and policies with implications that contradict its democratic purpose. The amendment of Article 31 of the Constitution, for example, illustrates this need for constantly weighing all the factors involved. The amendment gave the legislatures the power to determine what is fair compensation when land or property is appropriated by the government. By so doing, however, the power of decision was taken away from the judiciary. Was it necessary to weaken the judiciary in order to strengthen the legislature? What effect will such an action have ultimately on the personal property rights of the individual or cultural and religious associations? The state is empowered to appropriate property by the constitution, but should not the judiciary continue to examine the manner in which it is done? Therefore, while the amendment can be justified as necessary in the interests of economic justice, its effect on the judiciary as the guardian of democratic rights needs to be watched.

Secondly, we need to be aware of the limits of state action especially in dealing with social problems. The democratic view holds that man is not only a political being but that his life is essentially social in character. While the state's responsibility for the welfare of the people empowers it to intervene even in the non-political areas of man's life, it should be conscious of the limits of bureaucratic methods in dealing with human problems. Since the state is the most powerful organisation in India, it needs to foster forms of voluntary action which are different from state action. The state can preserve its function as the servant of man only by maintaining the distinction between itself and society. Speaking at the first conference of the chairman of State Social Welfare Advisory Boards, President Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, "The idea of a Welfare State is good and is no doubt being pursued by the Government of India. But just as in the field of economics, more so in the field of welfare, it is necessary to pursue a mixed welfare policy. The wisdom of pursuing a mixed policy lies in knowing where to draw the line. Some welfare services touch and influence aspects of personal and family life. Here there is a danger of the state encroaching upon and monopolising the entire range of the wide variety of welfare problems ranging from personal and family problems to widespread socio-economic problems. The government machinery even if it be of a welfare state, is by virtue of its very constitution impersonal, whereas welfare services require a human touch which the voluntary social worker alone can bring to bear upon them".

Thirdly, the pyramid of state power should be based upon the foundation of local self-government. The strength of the central government should not depend upon the power of the police and the armed force, but upon the vitality of the political and social life engendered by local bodies like district boards, municipalities and village panchayats. If there is not a sufficient distribution of powers heightening the sense of local initiative and responsibility, then the pyramid can become inverted with all powers flowing to one central point.

The Regeneration of Social Life

All that we have said above underlines the fact that a democratic form of government must have its roots in a democratic pattern of social life. Democratic and egalitarian political institutions without a corresponding democratic outlook in social institutions inevitably lead to a lack of cohesion and harmony. Either the effort to create democratic traditions will arouse a conservative reaction or the democratic institutions will become a caricature of what they were intended to be.

Since democracy must have its roots in the mental, moral and spiritual outlook as well as in the habits, manners, customs and general social behaviour of the people, it calls for a reorganisation of Indian society. The endeavours of leaders like Ram Mohan Roy show that this fact has been recognised in India for a long time, but such a reform of society has become an urgent necessity with the coming of independence. The task of the social reformer is never an easy one and it is not surprising that recent attempts at social legislation like the Hindu Code Bill have met with a certain measure of opposition.

There are two main problems which face social legislation in India. The first is the necessity for basing social legislation upon a sociological understanding of various forms of Indian society. This is best illustrated by reference to the problem of the assimilation of the tribal people. To assimilate them without destroying what is good in their pattern of society require social studies which probe deeply into the psychological basis of their institutions and customs. The second problem is represented by the fear of 'Westernisation'. What is behind this fear is that India will only destroy all that was valuable in her own social and cultural traditions by trying to imitate the social patterns of the West. It raises the whole question whether our social institutions are capable of modification in the interest of a democratic way of life or whether they need to be replaced by a completely different social pattern.

The discussion aroused by the Hindu Marriage Bill reflected both the recognition of the need to give direction to changes which are taking place in the ethos and structure of the family and the fears entertained by some that what has been valuable in the joint-family system may be destroyed by hasty legislation. The Hindu Marriage Bill legalised inter-caste marriage, made monogamy the rule, and gave the right of divorce to women. This legislation is an expression of the new sense of individual freedom and the demand for greater equality between caste and caste as well as between man and woman. While there has been a large measure of agreement over inter-caste marriage and monogamy as indicating healthy social goals, the question of divorce has been much more controversial. While this right of divorce is necessary for giving real equality to women, there are legitimate fears that it will loosen family ties. By this we do not mean that we should preserve the joint-family as it was, in which marriage was governed more by social considerations than by the responsible decision of two individuals. But it is important that the new freedom given by the Hindu Marriage Bill should not lead to a type of union based on mere physical attraction or convenience in which divorce only underlines the meaninglessness of marriage. The value of monogamy is that it makes possible a kind of union in which two free and equal partners are bound together, by personal loyalty and common devotion to moral purposes which make marriage permanent and meaningful.

Acharya Kripalani in an article on Marriage Reform says, "The joint-family pattern of Hindu life has not changed for the mass of our people". He goes on to state that he has no love for the joint-family system because of the nepotism it leads to in commercial and public life but asks the pertinent question, "Can the joint-family in India be ignored in the present stage of our state organisation and economic development"? It is true that the joint-family system has been an effective social and economic welfare agency in the past. But today many of those functions of the joint-family have become the responsibility of the state. And rightly so, because the state must counteract the nepotism which flows from family loyalties. Further, if the joint-family system is allowed to flourish under a democratic state, then its bad features will penetrate the life of the state, make nepotism rife, in government and stand in the way of economic justice.

A further point made by Acharya Kripalani is that though the joint-family system might be passing away, its emotional roots remain. This is certainly a serious problem for a country which is developing a new sense of nationhood. We have to find new centres of community life which will attract the same spirit of loyalty, cooperation and sacrifice which was found in the joint-family system. Such a spirit can and should express itself through many forms of professional and voluntary service. Unless such a spirit develops among the great army of professional and voluntary workers, our Five-Year Plans cannot hope to succeed.

If the family is the primary unit of social life, the village is the base of Indian society and its regeneration is recognised as a task of the utmost importance. Here again, the problem is to transform our villages in such a manner that they can become the base of the democratic pyramid. Gandhiji was very conscious of the disruption of the traditional pattern of community life and realised the dangers that would result from the uprooting of the villager and the destruction of his sense of social and economic security. But Gandhiji's economic programme was geared too much to the idea of village self-sufficiency. The Community Project idea develops Gandhiji's insights by seeking to preserve the community sense of the village within a growing industrial society. It seeks to integrate the village economy into the national planning of agricultural and industrial development. It places emphasis, not only upon the revival of old cottage industries but also upon cooperatives and new forms of industry and industrial techniques which would improve village economy and provide employment to idle hands, without destroying the sense of the community. The Community Project idea recognises that the regeneration of the village is possible only by reviving and revitalizing every aspect of village life on a democratic basis. We agree with the second evaluation report on the Community Project published by the Planning Commission which says "Never was a more helpful outlook for building democracy from below available as when the Community Projects went into action. If we persist with the method, without straying into easy ways of formal official compliance and induced popular participation, a lasting service to the cause of democratic progress would be rendered. Popular leadership on which depends the success of community projects as well as of democracy cannot be called forth in any other way". If this is true, why is it that the Community Project Scheme has been more successful in achieving its economic goals than in the transformation of village society on a democratic basis? The lack of an adequate democratic philosophy which would overcome the traditional ways of thinking entrenched in caste and other authoritarian institutions, the bureaucratic approach which the Project leadership has not succeeded in entirely eliminating, the absence of education among the villagers

and of an educated leadership within the village, the dearth of non-governmental voluntary social agencies and the weakness of cooperatives and panchayats are among the reasons which are given. These are valid obstacles which need to be overcome, but the important thing is to "persist with the method". For, failure here may mean the failure of democracy in our country.

Parallel with the problem of the revitalisation of village life is the problem of giving direction and guidance to the growing industrial democracy of our towns and cities where the evils of the machine age like slums and bustees and the disruption of social and community life are already in existence. While the ending of overcrowding and the removal of insanitary conditions through housing and town planning schemes is a pressing need, it is not merely a problem of brick and mortar. It calls also for methods by which a sense of community life and civic responsibility can be engendered. The damage done to the social, moral and spiritual life of the industrial workers, most of whom are uprooted villagers, will be harder to repair than the damage caused by their unhealthy surroundings. While municipalities and other civic bodies should be more aware of the need to extend the amenities they provide to areas in which industrial workers live, the provision of facilities such as parks, playgrounds, libraries and recreational centres will not by themselves create a sense of community life. The workers themselves must be encouraged to become responsible for developing patterns of community life. It requires a changed attitude to cooperatives and trade unions and a recognition of the fact that they have more than purely economic functions. Cooperatives and trade unions are also means whereby the workers can build the social and cultural aspects of an industrial democracy by their own efforts. As in the villages, the important thing is to develop initiative by encouraging the workers to share in the responsibility for implementing the programmes, aimed at the betterment of their own economic standards and social life.

In spite of his difficulties, the industrial worker has a greater sense of social solidarity and neighbourliness than many sections of the middle and upper middle classes who inhabit our cities. The life of "high society" has a flashiness and a glitter which conceals a great deal of superficiality and the fact that the disruption of community life has gone further among the so-called "Westernized" sections of the people. The existence of "redlight districts" in our towns and cities shows the extent of the disintegration of family life and morality. The meaningless life of so many exclusive clubs and the time wasted at cocktail parties reveal the social irresponsibility of some of the wealthier sections of the people. There is a growing class of nouveau riche whose lack of culture makes them incapable of contributing to the growth of a fuller and a deeper social life. How can these wealthy business and professional sections of the people be harnessed to the tasks of national and social reconstruction? It requires the growth of organisations among business and professional men like Y.M.C.A.'s, Rotary Clubs and Seva Samajams which are not based on furthering the economic interests of the group concerned, but on some moral ideal aimed at fostering social responsibility and the spirit of service. The goodwill and generosity engendered by such organizations will not by themselves produce economic equality and justice. But the recognition by the wealthy of the fact that India's goal is a socialistic pattern of society and their cooperation in bringing about that end will certainly contribute to the changing of society by peaceful and democratic means. The purely exploiting sections of this class are bound to disappear with the achievement of a socialistic pattern of society but other sections like the managerial, professional and administrative classes will be able to develop a greater sense of responsibility and social integrity with the coming of greater economic equality.

Building the Economic Basis

The backwardness of India makes the building of the economic basis for the social welfare of the people one of the primary responsibilities of the state. The stupendous nature of the task confronting our country staggers the imagination and presents a challenge which will test our determination to emerge from the struggle as a modern welfare state. It means that the state must make far-reaching changes in the existing structure of property relations both in land and industry, not by lowering but by improving the standards of living. It calls for the planned development of industrial production in a country with limited resources without adding to the vast army of the unemployed by the introduction of machinery. It requires the careful balancing of the needs of agriculture and industry. And the rising standards of living must keep pace with a rapidly growing population.

All these objectives have been summed up by the Avadi Resolution of the Congress in the expression "a socialistic pattern of society". But how can these changes which took centuries to accomplish in the West be brought about within the life of a single generation in India?

Further, how can this tremendous economic revolution take place without our having to give up the democratic basis of our state and government? The changes required call for the ruthless use of power against anti-democratic and anti-social elements within the country. Can a democratic government use such power without provoking a civil war? Can a democratic government remain democratic or will it succumb to the temptations that the use of such power will bring? Pandit Nehru, who is acutely aware of this problem, has pointed out that "there are no examples in history where this kind of experiment has been tried in any country". It is something new in history - this attempt of a large backward country to transform radically itself without succumbing to the temptation to adopt totalitarian methods. While the temptation to use totalitarian methods must be resisted, this economic transformation obviously cannot be achieved without a radical change in the prevalent conception of democracy. These changes in democratic methods are needed most in dealing with our economic problems. Pandit Nehru has expressed his confidence that the economic progress of India can be achieved by peaceful democratic processes because he feels "sure of the Indian people". He has not made clear exactly what he means by his faith in the Indian people. Such a faith would be reasonable only if we can be sure that the masses are pledged to the use of peaceful, democratic methods. It means that the Indian people must develop a democratic philosophy of life which will direct and infuse all the economic changes which they wish to make.

The most urgent need is for agrarian reform and land legislation which will change the feudal structure of Indian agriculture. The lesson of China is that it is on this issue that the fate of democracy in Asia will be decided. Democracy cannot survive in India without "a solid base of a contented peasantry". Vinoba Bhave has rendered a real service to the country by focussing attention on the necessity and urgency of land reform through his Bhoodan Movement. He has also made a beginning towards the distribution of land to the peasants. State governments have introduced legislation to legalize land gifts. But the Bhoodan Movement is more in the nature of a campaign for land reform than a practical method by which it could be brought about. The Bhoodan Movement points the way, but it cannot be a substitute for effective land legislation.

Zamindari Abolition Acts have been passed in several states, but the compensation to be paid to the landlords amounts to very large sums of money and puts a strain upon the limited financial resources of the country. Further, since the compensation to be paid is to be recovered by taxing the peasantry, it does not lighten the burden of rural indebtedness. The abolition of Zamindaris has also failed to meet the needs of the landless labourers, as it is only the rich peasants who have been able to acquire tenancy rights by agreeing to pay rent to the government for a fixed period of years. The amendment of Article 31 of the Constitution may have some effect upon this question of compensation because it empowers the legislature to determine the amount to be paid. But the failure of the Congress to carry out far-reaching land reforms really leads to the suspicion that it is too closely allied to the landed interests to see that there is no moral justification for compensation in most cases. It is the main reason for the scepticism of the land-hungry peasants about the ability of a government pledged to legal and democratic processes to bring about an agrarian revolution. It is not surprising that the landless labourer is the most ardent supporter of parties which promise to give him land by violent means, if necessary.

Closely related to the problem of agrarian reform is the question of industrialization, because the enormous pressure upon the land must be eased by a planned programme of production. State control and planning is necessary in our country because industrialization must solve and not worsen the problem of unemployment while private capital must be made to subserve the goals of social welfare. India is trying to do this through planning based on the theory of a mixed economy. From the economic point of view, it recognizes the futility of total nationalization by giving scope for free enterprise to pioneer in the development of new industries. It also encourages foreign investments to strengthen weak industries or to develop industries which are beyond the capacity of India at the moment, like the new oil refineries at Trombay. The fact that the private sector is still largely composed of foreign enterprises has been criticised. But the government has been realistic in recognizing that industrial development is not possible without foreign capital, technical resources and aid while remaining aware of its possible effects both on social planning and foreign policies.

The theory of a mixed economy is also guided by certain political considerations affecting the character and functions of the state. It is an admission of the need to allow for certain areas of economic life not dominated by the state as being important for the preservation of freedom in a planned economy.

Planning in a mixed economy cannot hope to succeed without an adequate response from both capital and labour. The role assigned to the private sector is not purely economic but also moral, for it is asked to cooperate in the building of a better society based on equality and justice. Such a response cannot be expected from the industrial and commercial classes unless they accept the values of the democratic framework within which they must function and give their loyalty to the ideal of a welfare state. If they fail to cooperate with the state in the creation of a socialistic pattern of society, they will only hasten their own liquidation by proving to be obstacles in the path of India's progress. A mixed economy also calls for responsible behaviour on the part of labour. An irresponsible trade union leadership could retard the progress of an industrial development aimed at increasing social welfare. The state has to prove to labour that its control of the private sector is real and that its planning will result in increased standards of living and

economic equality. If labour can be convinced of this fact, then it could play a vital part in the industrial development of the country, provided the state is wise enough to take it into its confidence in its planning. In this sense, India's economic progress depends on the degree of cooperation and understanding which exists between three partners in a joint enterprise - the state, the private sector (which includes the foreign elements) and labour. It brings us back to our fundamental thesis that such cooperation in so great an enterprise as the building of a new India cannot succeed unless it is motivated by a democratic spirit. Human relations play their part in such an undertaking, and success will depend upon many factors like the ability to compromise, efficiency, loyalty, integrity and the sense of working together in a great common cause. The test of democracy in India will be whether it can evoke this sense of common understanding and cooperation. It involves the task of reconciling the administrative and bureaucratic approach with the methods of business enterprise and the bridging of the social gulf which separates capital from labour. The growing sense of social equality which such cooperation would engender should smoothen the path towards the goal of economic equality. It will make possible the achievement of justice without the destruction of national unity by class war and social hatred.

Education for Democracy

The fuller realization of democracy in political, economic and social life depends largely on the intelligent appreciation of its values by the people. The People's Edition of the First Five Year Plan states this fact very succinctly when it says, "The success of a democracy depends on the growth of a spirit of cooperation, disciplined citizenship and the capacity of the ordinary citizen to participate intelligently in public affairs". Such intelligent participation in public affairs is not possible without the permeation of the democratic outlook among the masses through education. While there is an urgent need to make education available to larger numbers of the people and to increase facilities for professional and technical training, it is equally important that the knowledge imparted should be infused by ideals of responsible citizenship in a democracy.

It is recognized that the present system of education, while not without its values, tends to divorce the intelligentsia from the masses and does not contribute to the adequate spread of progressive, democratic ideas among them. Further, it is not sufficiently related to the traditional culture and needs of the country. Therefore, the present discussion of educational reorganization and the medium of instruction with the new emphasis on Basic Schools, Rural Colleges, technical training, and social education is significant. This new appreciation for the traditional, moral and spiritual values of our country should help us to select what is democratic in the old culture and to incorporate it with the modern democratic outlook. In this connection, it is striking that the Bandung Conference spoke of the need to develop the cultural renaissance of Asian countries within the context of world culture.

National freedom has stimulated the renaissance of different strands of Indian culture with their roots in different languages and religions. While this revival of cultures is to be welcomed, it has also led to certain separatist tendencies and linguistic controversies. Much that is unsatisfactory in modern Indian life can be traced to these fissiparous tendencies. Therefore, one of the essential tasks in education is to preserve what is positive in these cultural revivals and, as Humayun Kabir has put it, "to provide a meeting

ground where values inherited from ancient and mediaeval India can be combined with the fresh influx of knowledge and experience from beyond the seas". Our developing sense of nationhood and democracy must be undergirded by a common cultural outlook conducive to both personal freedom and social cohesion.

Another aspect of the problem of education for democracy is the need to make it appealing to the hearts of the people. Men are not guided primarily by abstract ideals but by ideals which come alive in myths, symbols, and rituals which direct the emotions. Democracy in India will evoke an emotional response in the people, only when it expresses itself through indigenous cultural forms. For example, Sarvodaya is an attempt to bring about a synthesis of traditional values and democracy. Such attempts have been going on since the time of Ram Mohan Roy. But the gulf between the old authoritarian traditions and the new democratic freedoms still remains unbridged. This is the creative, cultural task which remains to be fulfilled.

The Christian Foundation

History bears testimony to the fact that the growth and development of democratic political institutions and democratic social values depended in great measure on the religious convictions of Christian citizens in the Western countries of the 17th and 18th centuries where democracy as we now know it, first took root. It may well be claimed that in countries which have adopted a democratic constitution and where the majority of people are convinced believers in other religions, Christian citizens have a special responsibility, not only to help to work effectively the democratic structure of Government but also to translate the democratic values of life in terms of social action. Therefore, all that has been said so far should be specially significant to Christians in India, for the reason that their religious faith places unique emphasis upon just those convictions about the nature and destiny of man which furnish the foundations for what has been described as the democratic view of life.

The Christian creed gives unparalleled importance to man in the total scheme of life because it regards man as being created "in the image of" the creator, unlike other creatures. So that this Christian doctrine of man endows man with a dignity and sense of mission, a sense of purpose and creative potential, a capacity for personal relationship and sense of community, all of which undergird and uphold the conception of man which is involved in the democratic view of life. Only a Christian who takes his faith in the Incarnation seriously can go all the way with the social democrat who insists on the recognition of the human right to "liberty, fraternity and equality" and all that it involves, because the Christian believes that to him every man is a "brother for whom Christ died". Moreover, because of the supreme purpose of the Incarnation and the consequent place of central importance given to the Cross in Christian belief and practice, the Christian carries with him the chastening reminder of man's proneness to sin, his tendency to rebel against the very good which he covets. This Christian realism about human nature, even at its very best, is the much-needed corrective to contemporary humanistic overstatements about the perfectability of man under circumstances of life in this world. In fact the safeguards of democracy are provided with this specific purpose of preventing men in authority forgetting their human tendency to be corrupted by power. The Christian faith is therefore constantly reminding men of their present state of being forgiven sinners, always viewing their conduct with severe self-criticism and at the same time striving to do their very best to be worthy of "the great calling wherewith they have been called".

And this calling is not only to a present fellowship of men and women in mutual forbearance and true regard for one another seeking to realise a sense of true community but also bring in the dynamic hope that out of this very imperfect present condition there will emerge the transformed community of the wholly redeemed fellowship of the veritable children of God - the new creation of everlasting Kingdom to come. All this has been said to show, not that the democratic conception of man is the same as the Christian belief about the nature and destiny of man, but that the Christian understanding of human nature and its possibilities can provide the necessary support of religious conviction on the one hand, and the much-needed corrective of discerning judgment, on the other. Thus the Christian's task in a world in quest of democratic values is in a real sense intimately related to the faith by which he lives day unto day and the faith to which he testifies in all his relations with his fellowmen. What we have been talking about so far is then something which profoundly affects the Christian's being and thinking in the present condition of ferment in India. It makes insistent demand that the Church in India takes to heart with greater concern its mission and message for our times.

The Christian Contribution

The fact is that the Christian Church has indeed made a significant contribution in awakening the social conscience of men everywhere. It could not have been otherwise, where Christian men and women have earnestly sought to bring to bear upon the conditions of life around them, the judgment of Christian standards of conduct. If consecrated Christian missionaries crossed the high seas, penetrated the vastness of tropical forests, braved the enervating heats of the plains, to proclaim the Gospel to men everywhere, it was also with the view to make men realise their true worth, to open their eyes to the common good of fundamental human rights to which they also had rightful claim, to "preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised". It is true that sometimes this social concern which is integral to the Gospel has been pushed into the background in the evangelist's eagerness to save "souls". We forget to our peril the true nature of the Gospel if we neglect the fact that in the wisdom of God, the Christian Church this "chosen generation, a royal priesthood" has also a social mission to perform in every age.

It must be said to the credit of the pioneers of Protestant missionary enterprise in India, that they recognised this fact. They knew that the obligation to preach the Gospel involved the responsibility also of establishing schools and colleges, setting up dispensaries and hospitals, of courageously taking issue with contemporary social evils. Perhaps they did not then realise, nor for many years later, that they were initiating a social and political revolution in our country. Other forces have also been responsible - Western liberalism, modern technology, and the like. It is nevertheless true that from Ram Mohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi a steady stream of national reformers were all deeply influenced in their life and work by the Christian conception of man's worthfulness and his significant place in the scheme of things. Although they did not accept the total claims of the Christian faith, none of them would deny that in their campaign to end contemporary political injustice and social wrong they were inspired by Christian teachings. That may be poor consolation, but we must remember that it is at the same time a challenge to the imperfection of our testimony and the importance of our living example.

It may be true that Christians had been responsible in the pioneering days of Christian Missions in India to rouse the conscience of people against the inhuman practice of untouchability, the rigid customs of caste exclusivism that set up impenetrable barriers of separation between people, and the harsh sanctions of tradition which denied Indian women equal rights with men. But the fact remains, that in India a great many of these reforms were in fact put into effect in Indian society by the efforts of non-Christian national leaders. In this we should rejoice, but at the same time we must seriously question ourselves whether as Christians we have given sufficient support to these social reforms which emerged in the process of India's recent struggle for political freedom and her present quest for democracy. We should also examine our own social life as Christians in India, within and without the Church, and see to what extent we are free of these evils.

There is considerable truth in the claim that congregations of Christians in the rural areas have been more loyal in the profession of the faith and in their practice of Christian standards of conduct. Perhaps this is still so even in our day. But this generation does not know what persistent fight the early converts from the outcaste and low caste groups had to put up against fierce prejudice and traditional conservatism in order to wrest their human rights. If their non-Christian compeers gathered courage to offer similar resistance for similar rights, it was also because they were emboldened by the example of their Christian brethren. In the same way, it is also true that the pioneers of reform in the matter of women's rights, the sanctity of the home and the family, the early agitators for just wages and higher standards of life were these village converts. From their ranks, again, came the early village school teachers and catechists, the nurses and dispensers, the local leaders who busied themselves for the common good, sowing seeds of discontent in the minds of those who had long got used to remaining dispossessed, under-privileged and suppressed.

Even until recent times, Indian Christian teachers, both men and women, helped shape the mind and character of youth in the schools and colleges situated in our urban areas. In the professions and in the service of the state, they gave loyal service and helped set up high standards of integrity. Indian Christian leaders of a previous generation visualised plans of social reconstruction and economic rehabilitation in villages, and pioneered in the organisation of volunteer social service agencies to harness the enthusiasm of city youth, to salvage the underprivileged, to clear the slums and to spread literacy. But it must be admitted that Christian India did not figure large in the struggle for national freedom, although from the outset Indian Christian leaders had made it clear that they abrogated all claims to "communal rights" for they regarded themselves as an integral part of the Indian people.

The Christian Community Today

Today, however, there is a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, a failure of nerve, which gives the impression of a tragic apathy in the vast majority of Indian Christians. This is more so in the case of those who live in urban areas. Living for the most part in the large towns, economically better off than their forebears, in some cases even prosperous and important, they are content to remain silent and anonymous, part and parcel of the educated middle class. Their main aim in life now is how to get on, make more money for themselves, secure their private interests and live by themselves and for themselves. This

insidious danger must be prevented. For what is happening is that the Indian Christian, by and large, is no longer in the swim of things, he is not aware of the swift currents of the social revolution that are sweeping over the country, unconcerned and indifferent. Perhaps this description is overdrawn, but none of us Indians dare deny that there is enough truth in the caricature to sting.

What is needful is that we take more seriously to heart our Christian responsibility in these present times in the context of the social changes that are overtaking our country and in view of India's determination to be a "sovereign democratic republic" based on "a socialistic pattern of society". This means that the Church should wake up and set about eradicating the social evils to which India's Christians themselves are prey. The most scandalous betrayal of Christian faith which continues to be a running sore in our social life is the persistence of caste observance. Although discrimination on this score is usually made when marriages are arranged, it is not uncommon for Christian people in town and village, especially in South India, to bring in caste considerations in the matter of everyday social relations. Discrimination is often made, again, because of social standing, wealth, language, area of origin and the like. All this is to repudiate the superior claims of vital brotherhood which is the core of Christian community.

Perhaps the most serious lapse in this regard is to be found in the life of the local parish. Factions are so frequently the order of the day, and the root cause is invariably traced to lust for power and pride of possession. Especially in times of election to office, Christian congregations fall prey to most unseemly show of violence and costly litigations, that the Christian Church becomes the laughing-stock of the non-Christian world. True sense of community can only be realised where individual differences are counterbalanced by social responsibility. It is in the government of the life of the local congregation that democratic values can be shown to rest on spiritual foundations of religious faith.

Two things have been said of the local congregation which are worth recall in this connection. It has been claimed that the Church is the training ground for democracy. If that alone is to be considered the total function of the Church, then such an estimate of the Church would be unworthy of its calling. But however high our conception of the Church, it may well be claimed that the local Church is in a sense also an educational agency helping men and women grow in social stature and community sense. The other thing that is also frequently heard in these days is about "the revolutionary significance of the local congregation". The claim is that the humble groups of Christians who form small congregations in any locality are really little bands of revolutionaries, people "who turn the world upside down". No truer description of the function of the parish in relation to the local community in which it is placed can better state its leavening influence on society, especially in these days of radical change in values. It is no longer our task merely to go about patching up things piece-meal where wrongs have to be righted, but courageously to take action and cooperate with people of all faiths to concerted action that the very fabric of society is made over radically in pattern and purpose to serve the ends of justice.

Immediate Tasks

In relation to the times in which we now live in our country, Christians need to engage themselves with devotion and faith in four immediate tasks for which they are in a way peculiarly fitted. Reference has been made to some of

them in previous pages. Here we single them out for special attention in order to interest individuals and groups to plan and promote specific projects along these lines. First among them would be the task of interpreting and giving meaning-content to the concept of the Secular State. India has decided to adopt this political ideal for the definite reason that we do not want to give the wrong impression that this is a Hindu nation with Hinduism as the established state religion. But the fact remains that a vast majority of the population is Hindu, and this creates a problem of crucial importance to the other religious minorities who are also citizens of India with equal rights and privileges. A secular state gives due regard to the religious scruples of people of all faiths, making no distinction among them, granting no special favours nor making any invidious discrimination on the score of a citizen's religious affiliation. This would apply also in the case of those who claim to profess no faith. All this must not be understood to mean that a secular state does not recognise religion in the sense that it is opposed to it. On the other hand, a secular state is bound to safeguard the rights of its citizens to practise, preach and propagate their religion, provided of course in so doing they do not cause any breach of public peace and order. In India the Constitution guarantees such rights to all citizens. This is all for the good. But in actual fact certain practical difficulties have to be ironed out till we come to common understanding of the nature and scope of the secular state. In the main these difficulties are three in number. The vast majority of the people in our country being Hindu by religion, they easily take it for granted that whatever is Hindu should be acceptable to all Indians. We have still to learn that there are religious minorities in our midst whose rights should not be violated. Moreover, the tendency is still to interpret religious values and even religious practices, such as worship, in terms of Hindu religious conceptions. The idea does not strike the mind of our fellow Hindu citizens that there may be other understandings of the same religious truths to which people of other faiths give a different meaning, and that because they hold to their point of view as fundamental to their faith , they may not be willing to surrender their right to their opinion - even for an apparent common good. Just here come the special difficulties which Christians in India experience at the moment, difficulties connected with the issue of "conversion", of "common worship", and certain cultural values which for the Christian involve underlying Hindu religious affirmations to which he may not in conscience subscribe. All these issues have to be squarely faced and frankly discussed so that as citizens in a secular state we help each other to a fuller understanding of our religious rights and work together to safeguard them. For, "religious freedom is the condition and guardian of all other freedoms".

This leads us to a discussion of the second task confronting us Christians in India. This is the more specific problem of religious liberty. Our Hindu friends are frequently complaining that Christians in India are not able to appreciate and profit by the "tolerance" which has all along been a characteristic of Hindu religious theory and practice. Here again there seems to be need for mutual discussion based on a real encounter of the two faiths. The Hindu conception of religious tolerance is based upon the Hindu evaluation of all religions as relatively true, and this assumption to the Hindu seems so reasonable that he cannot understand how others can question the validity of this dogma. The Christian, on the other hand, is not asking for such "tolerance", but the religious liberty to "propagate" his faith as resting upon the revelation of God in Christ which he believes is once for all and for all times, both unique and perfect, "delivered unto the saints". The real point in this issue

is that in India we have to concede as Hindus that true religious tolerance cannot be limited by any dogma, even if that dogma be that "all religions lead to the same goal" and the Christian will have to make it clear beyond all doubt that the relious liberty he pleads for is not only for himself but for people of all faiths, and demonstrate that in actual practice such liberty to "profess, practice, and propagate" one's faith need not lead to any activity which may be described as "anti-national" or as in any way contributing to breach of peace and order.

A third task is in a sense derived from the other two to which we have already referred. There is no more pressing a concern to all of us in India than that every possible effort be made to draw together the people of all language areas, caste background and religious persuasion to a common sense of loyalty to the state and a real bond of kinship as belonging to the Indian nation. It has been rightly indicated that Indian Christians have given the unfortunate impression of being "Westernized", of standing aloof in isolation from the main strea, of India's cultural life. Here, again, considerable ground has to be cleared if we are to appreciate each other's point of view. For one thing, the notion persists in the minds of many that Indian culture is synonymous with Hindu culture. For another, it is easy to forget that ours is an age when all cultures are in varying degrees of disintegration and that our generation is faced with the serious responsibility of reintegrating our national culture, which, of its very nature, will have to be composite and multi-patterned. Nevertheless there is considerable truth in the charge that the Indian Christian is not consciously involved in the cultural struggle, and that he is apt to look more to the West rather than to his own country's past and present, when he thinks in terms of cultural values.

Finally, there is the responsibility that the Indian Christian has of helping forge links of abiding fellowship between people of his country and the people of other lands, so that the world's quest for peace may be broad-based on the larger life of the human family, so that democratic social values may reach out, breaking all barriers of race, nationality and religion, to include within the fold of its all-embracing concept of individual freedom set off by social responsibility the total inhabited world.

For your information the following paper has been issued:
Project Paper No. 1 The Characteristics of Urban Centres in the East
by Dr. J.H.A. Logemann.